

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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## TWO OF FOUR TRANSPLANTED WOLVES KILLED IN MICHIGAN

Two of the four eastern timber wolves, an endangered species, transplanted from Minnesota to Michigan in March of this year have been killed--one by a car on a highway and the other by gunshot, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service said today.

Both were males, leaving two females on their own in separate areas of Upper Michigan.

The transplant and follow-up monitoring of the wolves has been a cooperative effort among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the States of Minnesota and Michigan, the Huron Mountain Club, the Audubon Society, and the Northern Michigan University. This experiment is part of a program designed to increase the survival chances of the endangered eastern timber wolf. Lessons learned from this effort will be used in future programs of this type.

Biologists became suspicious when signals from the wolves' radio collars, monitored from aircraft, showed the animals in the same location on two consecutive flights several days apart. The hit-and-run victim was found by biologists in mid-July on a road in Iron County, Michigan. This animal had been the pack leader of the four wolves transplanted from Minnesota.

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In late July the second dead wolf was found in a wooded area of Dickinson County, Michigan, after radio signals showed no movement by the animal in a week. It had died from three small caliber gunshot wounds in the body and head.

Federal agents have initiated an investigation into the killing of the wolf, which is protected under the Endangered Species Act. A private citizen, Dr. Harry Frank of Flint, Michigan, has offered a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of the offender.

The original pack of four wolves was released together in the wild and roadless Huron Mountains on the southern shore of Lake Superior last March, but they soon split, with the two males and one mature female moving west some 100 miles. These three then headed back toward the southeast, where they appear to have established a 250-square-mile home range in northern Iron County about 50 to 60 miles southwest of the original release point.

The fourth wolf, an immature female, never strayed far from the release point and today she ranges in a 200-square-mile area near the release point.

Additional transplants of wolves would require a permit under the Endangered Species Act. If another male is trapped in Minnesota and transplanted to Michigan, he may pair with one of the two females by next February when the breeding season begins.

Despite the loss of the two male wolves, biologists remain positive about the experiment. Dr. William Robinson of Northern Michigan University stated, "We have learned quite a bit. It is possible to conduct transplants such as this. That's the important question that needed answering. The wolves did not return to Minnesota as we thought they might when the three headed west. The direct mortality by man is a significant factor also," Robinson remarked. "This is particularly true when the animal population is so low. Each member is extremely valuable."

As to the future, Robinson reports, both females seem to have adapted to their new environment. They may meet and join individual wolves that occasionally roam into Michigan from Canada. Their food supply, which has been analyzed from droppings, is mainly deer.

Biologists hope to learn more of wolf behavior under transplant conditions when winter arrives and snow cover affords a better opportunity for close surveillance. Since the release last March, biologists have been flying two to three times a week to spot and track the wolves. This effort will be maintained through the coming winter as aircraft monitor the radio-collared females.

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